

Concerning NIMS, ICS and Plain Language ...

Recently NIMS, ICS and the use of plain language have been a matter of public discussion within the response community. The NIMS Integration Center wants you to know that it sees the use of plain language in emergency response situations as matter of public safety, especially the safety of first responders and those affected by the incident.

It is critical that all local responders, as well as those coming into the impacted area from other jurisdictions and other states, know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies and procedures. This is what NIMS and the Incident Command System (ICS) are all about. There are larger matters at stake here – achieving interoperability across jurisdictions and disciplines.

The plain language requirement is about the ability of area commanders, state and local EOC personnel, federal operational coordinators, and responders to communicate clearly with each other and effectively coordinate response activities, no matter what the size, scope or complexity of the incident. The ability of responders from different jurisdictions and different disciplines to work together depends greatly on their ability to communicate with each other. Everyone has to speak the same language – plain English.

Although the use of plain language is a requirement for FY06 compliance with NIMS, we understand that the use of 10-codes is not going to be completely eliminated by October 2006. Our goal is that good faith efforts are under way at all levels nationwide to move to plain English for all emergency operations. At the end of FY06, the states will certify to us that “taken as a whole” they and their local jurisdictions are NIMS compliant. Local jurisdictions will be working with their states to achieve compliance.

NIMS implementation is a long-term effort and won’t end in 2006. NIMS compliance requirements aren’t going to go away in 2007 or 2008 either. However, continued resistance to complying with NIMS requirements and use plain language will result in the loss of federal preparedness funding.

*The NIMS Integration Center
DHS/FEMA
Aug. 23, 2005*